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sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

THE SEASONS.

"KNOWLEDGE NEVER LEARNED OF SCHOOLS."

Edited by MISS ARMITT.

BIRDS OF LAKELAND.

THE BLUE TITMOUSE—*PARUS CŒRULEUS.*

VERY lovely in plumage is the Blue Titmouse. China-blue are the tints of its wings, tail, and head; delicate yellows show on its breast and underparts; and it carries bold strap-markings on cheek and throat. A cheerful little acrobat it is too, performing on the trees of wood-side and garden for its food-getting, all through the leafless winter-time, when birds are scarce. It disdains not either to take bounty of our hands, nor to add its lively, pretty presence to the feathered group at the window.

Lovely, yet hardly lovable, it seems! No traditional story or song enshrines the love of the people for it in the past, and it appears to be a particular favourite with no one. Self-contained, pugnacious, and (it is reported) even cruel in temper, it can hold its own amongst birds of larger size than itself (even if they be of the bold *Parus* family); and this temper perhaps it is that has earned it the local masculine name of tom-tit or tom-tee. Never by timidity does it appeal to man's pity, nor does it gain his heart by a well-placed confidence. It never regards him with that bright-eyed, observant gaze that convinces one the Robin might (in time!) become a personal friend, or suspect that the wise-looking little Wren (though it never condescends to our bounty) really knows a great deal about our affairs. Indeed, I think, though the impression may be unscientific, that a bird's mode of glance, or interchange of look with man, affects largely his feelings towards it.

Possibly the Blue-tit's eye suffers in effect, not only from the gay facial markings that cross it (and I have noticed how much larger and brighter than her mate's does the hen

Redstart's eye look, because it is set in sombre feathers), but because it does not rear its head for a bird-like look around. It is, in fact, like a feathered mouse, and its neckless head twists in pivot-fashion round. Its feet, too, seem better designed for hanging on by, than standing upright upon. Indeed, so great is its habit of clasping by claw, that it deals with any object of food presented to it in this fashion, even seizing a tiny canary-seed with both feet, the while—wedging the edge of its blue tail against the ground for support—it stabs the seed with its beak.

Its natural life, however, is spent in trees, for which it is physically adapted. Through the winter it explores the bark of these with the utmost industry. Insect life, in all stages, egg, larva, pupa, imago, are evidently acceptable to it, as well as the lowlier forms of vegetable life, and I have found it picking with eagerness the bark of a dead bough, beneath which was to be discerned a thin white layer of fungoid growth. Also, in the very early spring, when oak-buds begin to swell beneath their hard sheaths, it will hang to the tip of the bough, piercing and plucking to the heart of the buds, only, I fear, for the soft green centre within. But, shortly after, when the spread of the leaves begins, there is plenty of insect food for its getting, whereby it helps instead of hinders the tree's growth. Soft-bodied creatures without end are born from the myriad eggs of the moths that have lain dormant through winter, and the Blue Titmouse gobbles with joy these fast fattening and growing grubs. Now is the time, when food is so abundant, for it to produce its own offspring. Long before this the male bird's voice has been heard, in gay anticipation, as he thinks of a mate and courts her. Even in February and March the singing impulse that comes to all passerine birds, besets this member of a somewhat tuneless tribe. His song is not a double note, reiterated, like the Great Tit's, and the Coal's and the Marsh's, but a single high note, repeated with an accent that almost brings it into rhythm, and occasionally finishing with a little downward flourish. Without being melodious, it has a light, gay effect.

Presently the pair look for a hole in which to place the nest, and very happy and astute are they about the business, and very secret when they have found it. The choice of a

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hole, where large old trees are abundant, falls to a snug pocket in the bole or bough of oak, wych elm, cherry, or beech; but oftener, in Lakeland, it is within the recesses of an unmortared wall or byreside. Several times I have known a tree-hole taken that last year belonged to the Pied Flycatcher; so that the little bird's habit of choosing early, before migrants come, is a cunning one. And, having chosen, the hole has to be guarded and "stood by" till the right time comes—and it would never do to forestall this through misjudged haste—for building and laying. Very manful is the Blue Titmouse about this business, small as is his size. I have seen him, when a Great Tit invaded his right to a garden nest-box that he had taken previously, fight so fiercely that the two tumbled to the ground together; and, morever, he remained the victor and brought up a brood in the box.

Then, at exactly the right time for the coming food supply—and the birds fix their calendar wisely, by the bursting of the leaf-buds, and not by the day of the year—the two unite, and the hen promptly begins her nest, carrying in moss and small bents till a good deep cushion is formed, on which the many little speckled eggs are laid. Then does the cock-bird follow her with offerings of food, which she receives with fluttering wings and low pleased note. After that comes the cracking of the eggs beneath the mother's warm breast, and the parents' activity on behalf of the growing nestlings becomes incessant as May days go on. Very often the busy little Blue Tit's whole journeys to and fro with food are in sight, and their activity can be measured. Caterpillars are carried in, when the young are waxing big, at the rate of more than one a minute. The sanitation of the nest too has to be attended to.

Their colours become sadly dimmed after a fortnight of their labours, and should they bring the youngsters safely out of hole—a date varying, in my experience, from June 1st to 26th—they have still an arduous few days before them, in attending to the wants of helpless and crying bush-clingers.

But by-and-by the family party begins to patrol the trees in able-bodied comfort. Through hot summer days they will flit about the beech leaves, picking off, with cheerful notes of *mi-si-si* or *sip sippi*, the tiny but juicy morsels of blue-white aphides, which suck by the million the sap of the tree. Indeed their search for aphides and other insects will go on to September, when the first leaves, studded with corpses, begin to fall.

The family tie of the Blue Titmouse is soon shaken off, however, though the pair remain together through the year in great harmony; and the young early take independent ways, going to roost by themselves, or in couples. They like a dark shelter, and I have watched one or two go to bed in the deep inside cornice of a verandah with regularity through the evenings of the late July and August, the time at first being about 7.10 p.m.

The Blue Titmouse, towards autumn, appears to have a good reason for drawing to the house-face, and it may be heard "scrabbling" along the cross-bars of windows, and seen searching in crannies and corners of stone work and gutter. The reason, most certainly, is the tasty one of spiders, whose bags of eggs, laid about this time near the snares, it tears open and devours; and it is my impression that it eats the spider too, though I have never seen it actually devouring this, as I have the Wren. It will eat seed too in autumn, and will peck laburnum seed from the tree, but it is not, in my experience, such an inveterate seed-eater as its cousins the Great, the Coal, and the Marsh Titmice. Nor have I found it ranging the coppices, like the latter, in manifest search of cherry galls. Yet, when a broken gall has been placed outside the window, it has seized it with its feet, eaten the grub in centre, and then in visible excitement of palate, stabbed the tissue over and over, as if to see if there were more grub. With its mate, it joins on to those odd parties of Titmice that range in mid-winter the lonely wood sides together: and not till a time of spring and plenty does it, like many another, draw aloof and become exclusive and proud.

MARY L. ARMITT.

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DAISY.

BY MRS. USSHER.

Take a big dog daisy—it is like our small friend in all essential respects and is easier to study because it is so much bigger. I leave it to you to find out the dissimilar points and to infer which are the most important ones. You will have to make comparisons. Well, gather the dog daisy carefully, so as to get it entire, only spare its root! Take from me on trust that it is for the most part tap-shaped and digs into the ground with a will. First of all, at the bottom of the stalk is a tuft of leaves, and at the bottom of these leaves (which are arranged spirally, one close above another) are buds—future crawling, root-anchored runners. These runners do as the parents did; then they become ambitious, cock their heads three feet high and send out branches, each of which ends in a blossom, the central and oldest shoot being the first to bloom. Along the stalk are tolerably well marked ridges which end in leaves; the stalk is rough with hairs—may they not be intended to convey water to the root? the leaves come turn about and are bristly in places; at the bottom of the plant they are stalked and unequally toothed like a jagged saw; the upper leaves are stalkless and clasp the stem; in places the toothing along their edge becomes so deep and fine as to resemble a feather rather than a saw.

Now take one of the flowers, or rather, as in the dandelion, one of the colonies of florets: the colony stalk is channelled by grooves, which are separated by very distinct ridges, and two or three dwarfed leaves grow near the top of it—they are half way between the shape of the leaves lower down on the plant and the shape of those close up round the colony. These last overlap one another closely in three or four tight rows; they are bordered with brown scales and cover the florets entirely in the bud stage. These florets differ both as to shape and colour: the outside ones are white and rolled below into a tube like the florets of the dandelion; the middle ones are rolled all along, they are like golden bells tilted bottom up. Tear the colony in two from beneath:

then you will see the platform all dinted with little holes out of which the florets grow. They are arranged on a plan, as in the dandelion, and likewise get further and further apart, as the flower ages, by the bossing of the platform. If you were to roll up the dandelion florets along their whole length they would be very like these yellow bells, only longer. Both are traversed by five veins which fork in order to edge five notches, and are re-united at the top of each notch. Within, you again find a tube formed by dust threads,* joined at their edges, and inside again a dust shoot,† hairy in the daisy as in the dandelion—only in the daisy it is purplish instead of yellow and the dust shoot is green. Near the base of the dust shoot, above the seed vessel, is a little ball-shaped swelling: it is this that bulges out the yellow bells. The seed vessel is furrowed by eight grooves which turn purplish red, a lovely contrast to the light green ridges which separate them.

In the dandelion florets you saw cup leaves‡ reduced to hairs: here there are not even hairs, only a little rim where the eight ridges leave off. In some near relations of the dog daisy the rim is sufficiently raised to form a very shallow cup.

Let us compare the bells with the white flag-shaped florets. There are about thirty of these last, and they end in three notches instead of five. Does this mean that only three leaves go to make a white streamer? Examine the veins, especially on the back side: you will count six, joining at their ends into an arcade of five arches: the middle and widest arch corresponds to the central notch; the side notches correspond to a couple of arches apiece. You can follow the veins down to the very bottom of the flag, where it is rolled up tubwise. Well, each of the five arches is in reality the end of a leaf; but the five united leaves are outstripped by a growth which has only three notches—in order to deceive those who think they know things at first sight!

The white florets, like the yellow ones, tend to green below. And the seed vessel only differs from the one you looked at before in that it is longer, slighter, and more curved on the inner side; the grooves and ridges are the same, but the little cup rim is more pronounced, and is sufficiently toothed on its inner side to give you a guess at its nature. But now open the white floret and you will find a great difference—there are no dust threads, merely the dust shoot with its forked end. Look and see if you can find any hairs on it: there is a French botanist to tell you you won't find a single one, and a German botanist to tell you that they are there, only stunted—which of them is right? And why should hairs be scarce or absent on the dust shoots of these white florets? The answer is not difficult, and so I leave it to you. While you are looking and thinking you will probably notice that in some of the old yellow florets the fork seems absent: the dust shoot has swallowed all the dust* needful, and instead of greedily remaining open for more, it has closed up and retreated inside the bell again.

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* Stamens.

† Pistil.

‡ Sepals.

You saw how in the dandelion the outer and older florets close at times over the inner ones, so that the forked tongues can lick dust from the centre of the flower colony, and perhaps it occurred to you that a reversal of services may sometimes occur. For instance, by the time the dust shoots in the middle of the colony have split open the dust bags† are all empty. But some of their contents may still be clinging to the hairs on the oldest dust shoots, which can then supply the younger ones. In the aster, which is a far nearer daisy relation than the dandelion, the central florets are so grouped that, without any bending or stretching, their dust falls on the outside members of the colony (Kerner). In a still nearer relation, the camomile daisy, the stalk grows after a fashion which tilts or bends the outer florets into a position whence they can empty dust on the inner ones (Kerner). What happens to the daisy itself? I leave you to find out.

Now we come to what is a sad-coloured season for most flowers—our poor little daisy begins to fade. The limp white flags hang back and the blush on them browns, like a rosy apple in decay. This tendency of the florets to roll outwards is best seen in the dog daisy; but you must go to its small first cousin for the blushes, especially when its cheeks are turned to the cold night air, and it tries to hide itself under the dank meadow grass. In high or cold lands, too, you will find it braced to lively colour, and along with it many a usually pale-faced neighbour. But this is a digression. When the white flags are lowered and fall away, is it all over with our daisy? Not so: it defies Fate, and its bells ring out the changes of new glories. They stand out higher, for the seeds beneath them have grown, and the platform has heightened into a cone, throwing them all apart, and showing them off. Some are yellow, but many are scarlet and orange. These are the ones which the fairies have kissed. Gradually they drop away and the seeds drop after them. But the bare places on the dull or reddish green cone only serve to make the remaining bright bells seem brighter yet, and even when these are gone there is beauty left. The naked cone is swept by delicately curved lines of punctuation. Each dot marks the place where a seed grew. Round this light green cone is a dark green Elizabethan ruff, of which each part is sometimes edged with crimson. Green gradually gives way to umbers and ochres; cone, ruff and stalk—all that remains—blacken to decay. But our daisy need not mourn: it has been lovely to the last.

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* Pollen. † Anthers.

NATURE NOTES FOR NOVEMBER.

> "Autumn, laying here and there
> A fiery finger on the leaves,"

has come and gone, almost; the leaves have gone too, almost; the cleared space reveals much that has been lost to sight since early May draped all the trees with green. The great stems and branches are revealed, one sees clearly their form and their colour, and quite as clearly that they are not bare, except of leaves. All of them bear buds, each after its own kind in size and shape and colour, just as each has its own sort of branch in girth and length and colour, as well as attitude. On some of them is still "the fruit which in our winter woodlands looks a flower" at any other time of the year, but this, the Spindle tree, *Euonymus europæus*, Linn., is easily overlooked; it has no peculiarity of any sort to draw attention to it, its flowers even are small and green and share in the general insignificance, till October comes, and then late in the month when the leaves are gone the little tree is transformed into a veritable burning bush, visible from afar. A first sight of it in this state is ever memorable. The outer coat of the four-lobed fruit

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is crimson, and when it splits, the seeds are not thrown out, they remain visible within, and the colour arrangement is extraordinary, for they are scarlet. A bush or tree, in this its early November state, is one of the most brilliant things in nature, but it is a glorious sight that is not too often seen; it is not every Spindle tree, nor even half of all the Spindle trees there are that bear fruit at all, and of those that do it is not always that they cover themselves so profusely that the flame-colour is simulated. The reason of the spare fruiting of these trees is not to be told in a few words, it forms an interesting chapter in the evolution of form that is going on now as ever, and it is to be found by such as care to read it unspoiled by transcription in one of the concluding chapters of Darwin's *Forms of Flowers*. The sight of a bush in fruit may stimulate those who live in its neighbourhood to search for the flowers in early summer, and so to realize perchance the various forms and their meaning. The brilliant seeds have likewise their structure to be made out, the scarlet jacket they wear is a sort of extra garment achieved by very few seeds of plants at all, an extra wrapping which may in this case be pure ornament or of a use not yet made out, it is called an aril and grows up round the seed as the seed grows till it is finally completely enveloped.

The Alder trees that dwell by lake or stream have much to be made out in their winter state, their buds are a lovely purple colour, their catkins, the two sorts which are the flower buds of next year's spring, are of another hue of reddish purple; as well as these, there are the solid and full cones, the fruit of last spring's flowers, and, perhaps, also the skeleton and empty cones from which the seeds of the previous year's flowers have long dropped. In a pleasant little book recently published by Professor Miall, called *Round the Year*, one may read of the ways of these seeds, their mode of distribution, which answers the question—why do these trees always live on water margins? The winds of winter shake the Alder cones till the ripe nutlets of which they are built up fall, many of them, into the water by which they have grown. They do not perish there, they do not sink, they float away as the current goes. They are built up to be waterborne, these tiny nutlets, they cannot be wetted even by the water that carries them, so much oil is there about them; in their seed cases are many little air spaces—water-tight compartments that keep them floating an indefinitely long time on the surface; they may be drifted hither and thither as the winds drive the waters of the lake, or they may travel down the stream till the spring finds them still floating or stranded on some wet margin where they may germinate and so anchor themselves for life as did the generations before them.

In all November there are fruits to be found, scarlet hips, crimson haws, black sloes, these are everywhere, and being of one family their different structure is noteworthy. It is not every year that the oaks bear a great crop of acorns as they seem all to have done this year. The last great acorn year was 1896, three years ago; sometimes the interval is longer, as much as five years. The drain upon the tree to produce this store of fruit is so great that it needs from three to five years to re-store sufficient material for another such crop.

In the years of mild autumn weather there are not a few wild flowers to be found lingering through the month, perhaps to December. Daisies may be flowering indeed all through December, if the days are warm and sunny. I have found the larger daisy (*Chrysanthemum Leucanthemum*, Linn.) blooming as late as the 20th of November. The little weedy Erphorbias may survive till near the year's end, a climbing fumitory, the autumn gorse, a small Veronica, a vetch, *Vicia sepium*, *Lamium purpurium*, Fool's parsley, these and many more may be found as long as the weather lasts mild and open.

S. A.